



## Villes Ouvertes: Cécile, Sasha and Agathe in Latin America

We are three French students from Sciences Po Paris, and together, we form Villes Ouvertes!

- I'm Sasha, I'm 20, and I'm the president of the association. I was born in Paris, but I moved to New York when I was 9, where I lived for 8 years. A year ago, I worked for three months in an eco-village in Argentina, and that's when I decided that my goal was to promote such a sustainable lifestyle in the landscape I know the best: cities.
- I'm Cécile, 21, treasurer and artistic director of Villes Ouvertes. I'm originally from Alsace where I spent most of my life. I witnessed the ecological transition of a town close to where I live and it hit me that something had to be done to change our ways of living. The ecology, a zero-waste way of living and a sustainable agriculture are the subjects that passionate me the most. Studying this and having the opportunity to link it to the cities, where so many interactions happen and where policies are taken at a local level really was what motivated me to join and co-create this project.
- I'm Agathe, I'm 20, I come from a town in the north of France called Wimereux. I'm the general secretary of Villes Ouvertes. I have always been sensitive to the ecological question, nature has an important place in my life. I want to take part in the big change our society needs. The world population is still growing extensively, and cities still have a global negative impact on the planet. We need to redefine our cities to live in harmony with the environment, and Villes Ouvertes is my way to contribute to this big goal.

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Villes Ouvertes is an association that we created a year ago. The goal is to produce short documentaries about sustainable development, and most importantly, to raise awareness about the necessity to rethink

our cities to reach sustainability. We are conscious that our generation is facing a major challenge to fight global warming, and that's actually how we became friends in our university in the first place.



Why did we choose Latin America? To start with, it's the continent with the highest percentage of the population living in urban areas. So it made sense for us to go there in order to study urbanism. Furthermore, a lot of their cities have been pioneers in urban sustainable development for the past 25 years. A few examples: 94% of Montevideo's population (Uruguay) is powered by renewable energies; Curitiba (Brazil) is a world known case study in terms of social aid and urban transports, and Rosario (Argentina) has developed a very effective program of urban agriculture in the past 15 years, proving that growing our food within the cities is possible! And let's be honest, Latin America is amazing, and way warmer than France in December!

It just made sense for us to focus our project on sustainable development! It's the most urgent issue humanity has to face today, and we can't pretend we don't know about global warming anymore. Our planet is so unique, so beautiful, it would be a shame not to leave it as such to the next generations.

So why do we talk about urbanism? Well, by 2050, we'll be 9 billion people on earth, and 75% of us will live in cities. Today, cities represent 70% of greenhouse gas emissions. What these numbers mean is that, if we are to reach sustainability on global scale, we need to rethink our cities. That's one of the main battlefields if we want to live in harmony with our environment. Cities are also the place where many fields of sustainable development meet: green energies, sustainable transport systems, social inclusion, waste management, water treatment...



You're asking what the hardest thing in this project has been... Well, at the beginning, we were four. Unfortunately, Constance had to stay in France and we lost both a friend and our artistic director. So that was a major blow even before we started. But throughout the year, the hardest thing was to jump in the unknown, to step totally out of our comfort zone. We barely spoke Spanish, none of us really knew how to make videos, interviews...

But that's also why we are so proud! I guess sometimes, one just has to start walking on a blurry path to discover where he or she wants to. And that's why, today, the most gratifying thing is to see thousands of people watching our videos, and to receive support messages from people of all ages. That's why we undertook this project in the first place, and it gives us confidence to go forward and to believe that we can actually all work together to build a better future and better cities!



For us, sustainable development is about building a society where we, as a species, have a neutral or positive impact on our environment and resources, in order to make sure that future generations will enjoy the same resources. Sustainability is obviously about our ecological footprint, but also about rethinking our politics, economies and education to be more fair towards other humans as well.

Sustainability has become a lifestyle. It's only by changing ourselves on a small scale that we will make a big difference. So we eat local, try not to consume only what we really need, stay positive all the time. The only problem is our carbon footprint due to all the flights we have been taking in the past year!! Hopefully, we'll be more anchored next year...

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- Cécile: I will go back to France at the end of May. We have interviews planned there as well and I will continue my studies, doing a master degree. What I am bringing back is this unquenchable curiosity for citizens' initiatives in the subject of sustainability and the will to continue reporting these kinds of initiatives. And I haven't yet thought about what the most difficult thing will be, but it will surely hit me once I'm back.

My main resolution in 2018 is to come close to a zero-waste way of life ! While travelling it is really hard and almost impossible (even though I heard people succeed). I will put all my efforts to achieve this goal when I return to France, starting by buying food in bulk stores.

- Agathe: I'm going back to France as well at the end of the year to continue my studies. Villes Ouvertes was truly a rewarding experience and I would like to stick to this guideline in my future job. Defending sustainable development as the necessary and urgent solution is a real motivation for now and then. I'm sure it won't be difficult but different, a different page of my life.

From the education I received I'm used to eating local and organic but my main objective this year will be to greatly reduce my meat consumption. And knowing myself, it will be quite a challenge

- Sasha: I don't think I'm going back to France/Europe next year. I'm just not ready yet, I feel my personal journey has just begun and I'm afraid I'm going to feel a bit out of place in an environment I already know very well after I have changed so much. But there's a lot of stuff to be done in France too, and why not come back one day!

There's a ton of challenges: totally quitting meat, use only public transports, use only biodegradable products. But the real challenge is to combine all this to inspire others around me and to start the change we so desperately need from the ground.

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*Pic credits: Villes Ouvertes*

*Follow Sasha, Cécile and Agathe through their journey:*

- Mail: [villesouvertes\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:villesouvertes[at]gmail.com)
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